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ABSTRACT

This document critically reviews the empirical evidence and theories that have emerged to document and explain ethnic, racial, and class differences in the rate of adolescent involvement in interpersonal violence. In the first section, recent data are presented on the incidence of violence among adolescents in the United States as documented in official reports. Of interest is the comparative rate of violence among youths as opposed to other population age groups. Data are also assembled to describe the ethnic and racial characteristics of adolescent victims and offenders. The second section explores some problems of conceptualization and measurement that must be considered when interpreting findings of ethnic, racial, or social class differences in rates of crime or violence. With the current trend toward viewing violence as a public health problem, the prevention of youth aggression has become a major objective of state and local public officials and federal agencies. Consequently, the third section assesses the relevance of documented group differences for devising policies and programs to reduce the incidence of violence. In recent years there has been a widespread public perception that children and adolescents are more likely to be involved in violence than were their counterparts in the past. Data suggest that the growth in rates of youth violence has not been as explosive as the media have suggested, but that adolescence is indeed a period of heightened risk for involvement both as victims and perpetrators in homicide, assault, robbery, and other forms of nonlethal violence. Data also suggest that higher rates of victimization and offending are found for homicide for African and Hispanic adolescents, but data about nonlethal violence is less clear. For the least serious forms of nonlethal violence, ethnic and racial disparities may not exist at all. (Contains 7 tables and 193 references.) (SLD)

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